

## **ASSESSING CULTURAL INTEGRATION IN ACTION**

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### **Introduction**

Current educational scholars and practitioners place substantial emphasis on the importance of assessment (Green & Johnson, 2009; Tovani, 2011). From elementary and secondary schools through higher education, the process of measuring outcomes to know how well students have actually learned the material is a hallmark of effective teaching (Darling Hammond & Bransford, 2005). In the field of education, *assessment* is a comprehensive process where student data is collected, interpreted, and utilized in the curriculum cycle. In recent years, this cycle has emphasized a strong connection to state and national standards and a call for all students to demonstrate proficiency through multiple measures including performance based methods. This has particular significance in New Hampshire, where a competency-based model has been the rule for high school graduation since 2005 (Bramante & Colby, 2012; “ED 306.27 High school curriculum,” 2011). Indeed, Southern New Hampshire University’s College for America has broken new ground in offering a competency-based degree at the post-secondary level (“A Milestone for Competency-based Higher Education,” 2013).

In a previous article, Southern New Hampshire University Professors Audrey Rogers and Lyra Riabov outlined their models of combining classes to achieve shared and departmental objectives (Rogers & Riabov, 2011). Since 2007, they have brought their pre-service educators and international students together in order to promote connections on campus, increase cultural competence, and advance the learning of culture and language. The combined classes project-based learning experience is a collaborative exchange between Education students and students of the Institute for Language Education (ILE) who are partnered and meet together during class time. Their various models for combining students range from a one session experience to three class sessions. Regardless of the model, multiple artifacts of student learning are produced and assessed. Each professor assesses the learning and progress of their students through formative and summative means based on specific outcomes. The purpose of this article is to describe the ways in which they assess student learning, connect the project outcomes to standards, and evaluate the overall learning experience itself.

### **School of Education Assessment Practices**

Teacher educators have the dual responsibility to not only teach assessment strategies in their education courses, but also model those practices students need to transfer into their own teaching. Effective practice in assessment includes utilizing a comprehensive approach with multiple opportunities to monitor students’ growth and provide ways for them to demonstrate their knowledge and skills (Green & Johnson, 2010).

At Southern New Hampshire University, the School of Education faculty largely adhere to a competency based assessment approach in their courses. Faculty practices inform candidates about New

Hampshire Department of Education policies that mandate corresponding competencies for every graduation requirement at the high school level. Indeed, even middle schools across the state are beginning to take a competency based approach (J. Marston, personal communication, September 27, 2013). Faculty teach candidates how to align their lesson outcomes and assessments to national standards, such as the Common Core. Faculty in the School of Education explicitly connect class lessons to the Common Core as a practical demonstration of ways to meet and assess those established standards. Further, in School of Education courses, pre-service candidates are assessed through formative means, such as student response systems and discussions, as well as typical summative methods such as projects, essays, and tests.

### Assessing Technology Skills

Rogers' teacher candidates who participate in the cultural collaboration project do so through a variety of her courses, but the largest percentage participate through the *Learning with Technology* class. Assessment strategies in the technology course are tied directly to course goals and state and national standards. The combined class experience and the resultant assessments addressed that are central to the class fall into the categories of technology and teacher candidate standards.

The first essential area of standards in *Learning with Technology* involves preparing students to understand how to integrate technology and promote its use by students in the classroom. To accomplish this, pre-service teacher educators learn those technological competencies included in the New Hampshire ICT standards that outline what their future K-12 students need to know and be able to do ("ED 306.42 Information and Communication Technologies Program," 2005). Supporting this is the National Education Technology standards (NETs) for teachers and students that teacher educators utilize. Assessment strategies tie back to these standards as described in the examples below.

These varied sources of standards directly connect to a range of work samples. Work produced by education students are assessed both informally and formally. Informal assessments *for* learning are formative and used by faculty to provide feedback and guide students toward instructional outcomes; while formal assessments *of* learning are implemented after instruction allowing the candidate to demonstrate achievement and a level of competence (Stiggins & Chappuis, 2006).

Conducted before and during the students' collaboration, informal assessments in the combined classes project are formative in that they are designed to monitor student progress of learning and provide feedback. For example, candidates demonstrate their ability to access and utilize web-based technology. Before the international students arrive for the combined class experience, education students download Google Earth. Dr. Rogers observes that students successfully download, launch, and are able to maneuver through the tool. Feedback is provided to students who struggle through this process. During the combined classes the observation continues in terms of how effectively education students can engage their partners to gain geographic information and explore information about countries using the tool. Real time guidance is provided for students who encounter any issues. During the combined classes, some student groups utilize the large interactive white board in class to model and demonstrate their ability to use the tool. This ability to download Google Earth, launch it, and effectively engage a partner in geographic and informational exploration using the tool correlate to NETs and ICT standards. Students' use of an online recording tool (Audacity™) is assessed in much the same way. Students download the software, launch it, record, and export mp3 files.

Formal assessment of candidates' technology skills is measured at the conclusion of the combined classes' experience. For example, candidates create a document in Google Drive™ that they share with their international partner and Dr. Rogers. They type their podcast script into this document and use it

during their recording. The podcast is assessed according to a rubric (Appendix A). The key criteria of the podcast include education students' articulation of their script, their enthusiasm, or voice modulation; the content of their presentation in terms of organization of ideas, the distribution of content between the group members, and the content of the script itself is also assessed.

As a demonstration of their competency in integrating technology into the classroom, teacher candidates include the ways in which they would use Google Earth™, Audacity™, podcasting, even electronic portfolios into their *Learning with Technology* ePortfolio. The portfolio pages they construct describe their lesson ideas, include relevant video, and provide dynamic links to web-based resources. Candidates' ePortfolios are assessed through a rubric that outlines five main criteria: their inclusion and alignment of lesson ideas to state and national standards, application of technology resources, use of varied assessments in their lesson design, demonstration of digital citizenship, and overall mechanics. This ePortfolio is a cumulative product of the semester course that encompasses a wide range of technological understanding and skills; the combined classes experience serves as a practical application for students to demonstrate their skills, learn more about diverse cultures in preparation for classroom teaching, and capture that learning for future reference.

### Assessing Cultural Competence in Pre-service Educators

The New Hampshire's Professional Education Standards<sup>1</sup> outline what future educators' need to develop in order to be successful in the classroom. In addition to technology, these standards address future educators' understanding of all students and their own growing cultural competence ("ED 610.02 Professional Education Standards," 2013). Understanding diverse learners and the implication for pedagogy and content is an essential goal of the combined classes' experience. Through this collaboration pre-service teacher candidates work directly with diverse students who hail from countries around the globe. By interviewing and partnering with multiple international students, candidates gain a global perspective through research and the face-to-face experiences.

Candidates' ability to converse with an international partner is informally assessed through observation; namely, that it is respectful, there is consistent discussion, the partners take turns, they do not speak too quickly, make eye contact, and use the computer or digital tools in a relevant way.

There are several formal assessments of candidates' understanding of diverse cultures and global issues. For example, pre-service candidates prepare for the cultural collaboration by doing research on their partner's country which is submitted and evaluated on a score of 1-10. A score of 10 denotes exemplary work that offers comprehensive information about the country with sources cited. A score of 8 or 9 equates to competent submission where the student has provided an adequate amount of researched information on their partner's country with the sources mostly cited. A score of 7 or below represents below proficient preparation for the learning experience and an automatic requirement to resubmit the work to attain a higher level of achievement.

At the conclusion of the combined classes, students reflect and synthesize their learning to construct pages within their *Learning with Technology* ePortfolio. For example, one page is titled "Global Trends" and includes all of the students' understanding of how technology is being utilized locally, nationally, and globally from their readings and outside research, including their work through the combined classes. On this page, candidates articulate the range of cultural perspectives. Importantly, candidates include the podcast they created and a reflection on the experience which typically includes

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<sup>1</sup> The Professional Education Standards are commonly referred to as the "610s" and are derived from standards published by the Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC).

discussion on how their attitudes changed from before the combined classes to after the sessions were completed.

### Assessing the Process

Both Professor Rogers and Riabov distribute a 20 question pre- and post- survey to students before and after the cultural collaboration. These are anonymous surveys that students access through an online link; students include a unique identifier so individual change can be measured. The education students take a pre-survey that asks such questions as their attitudes on using technology to facilitate connections between diverse students, perceptions of international students, and knowledge of cultural and global issues (Appendix B). The post-survey mostly mirrors the pre-survey using the past tense with added questions on the cultural collaboration itself (Appendix C). The ILE students take similar surveys (see Appendices D and E). The pre-surveys from both groups provide a baseline of attitudes from which Rogers and Riabov measure the effectiveness of the experience against post-survey data.

Rogers surveyed students before and after the combined class project to monitor changes in attitudes and to capture qualitative feedback on how education students responded to the experience. In the fall 2013, 34 of her students took both the pre and post survey and provided an anonymous unique identifier for matching data sets. One theme from their pre survey responses was that prior to this experience many teacher candidates had limited exposure to diverse students, international students in particular (8 respondents). This was not surprising given that a high number of SNHU students come from New England states. In an analysis of the pre-post data, candidates expressed changed beliefs in their open-ended responses. Post survey comments were 100% positive with descriptors such as “fun,” “exciting,” “cool,” “really enjoyed,” “fantastic,” “wow,” “favorite experience,” and “awesome.” For example, teacher candidates responded:

*At first I was really nervous about the cultural collaboration, but after our first meeting I LOVED everything about it. I loved meeting new people and I think learning about their cultures this was definitely awesome. Everyone is their [sic] own individual and this collaboration was definitely something to incorporate into the future classroom. It's important as a future educator to make sure students do not forget their individuality! –An Education Student*

*I enjoyed working with my partner. I did learn a lot. Although we may be different, come from different places and believe in different things, we were able to find a lot of similarities. I was nervous about this collaboration because to be honest, I have not really interacted with international people. I probably would never have if I never did this collaboration. I now feel confident to interact and meet with people who are different from me. From this collaboration, I feel as though diversity should be encouraged and celebrated more on campus. –An Education Student*

*I think that I went into this assignment with a fairly open mind, but I wasn't prepared to have such open discussions with my partners about his culture and life in his country. I think it was a very good experience, allowing me to gain insight into the sorts of cultural differences i[sic] will need to be aware of when I become a teacher. –An Education Student*

Other themes revealed through open responses were an apprehension about the project before it began (5 respondents) and four declared that they had “made a new friend” by then end.

Finally, seven respondents expressed the desire to do the project again; while six respondents described how this experience impacts their thinking about their future classroom and teaching. The qualitative responses revealed a significant impact on teacher candidates' attitudes about international students, issues of diversity in the classroom, and their own ideas about the role of technology in promoting collaboration between students.

The descriptive statistics on teacher candidates' Likert scale responses were not as powerful. Of the 14 questions analyzed for pre-post changes the median average increased on half the questions (questions: 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 18, and 19) and stayed the same on the other half (questions: 3, 9, 10, 13, 14, 17, and 20). The largest shift occurred on questions 1, 4, 6, 7, and 18 which emphasized gaining knowledge from and an appreciation of the international students through the face-to-face experience.

Overall, School of Education teacher candidates gained a clear understanding of the role of culture and language in the classroom. They witnessed firsthand the opportunity diversity offers and the importance of language development in learning content. Additionally, through learning about Prof. Riabov's use of the podcasts with her students, teacher candidates exited the learning experience with a toolkit of ideas for technology implementation with future P-12 students, including ideas to assist English Language Learners (ELL).

### **ILE Assessment Practices**

According to Prof. Riabov's assessment of international students' surveys and reflections, there were a number of factors that helped them improve their speaking and listening skills. Students were motivated to speak more in English by sharing their cultures with American students who demonstrated a sincere interest in them. The podcasts of the interviews were rich in the exchange of information about American and international students' cultures.

In the international students' surveys (see Appendices D and E) international students emphasized the following benefits of their participation in the combined classes' project:

- Active personal involvement in the learning process;
- Opportunity to learn English and culture in partnership with American students;
- Change of attitude towards American students and life on campus;
- Increased motivation to put more effort into the learning process;
- Development of awareness in their ability to be understood and be confident in successful participation in an American University class;
- Significant improvements in speaking and listening skills in English;
- Improved pronunciation.

### **Assessing International Students' Progress in English Learning**

Riabov used multiple means of assessing her students' work in the combined classes project. Besides active involvement in interviews and discussions in class, students had a joint task to produce a podcast by doing research on the topic of their discussion, write a script together with an American partner, use Google Drive™, and then record it in class using Audacity™. The international students had access to these podcasts through Blackboard™ or iTunes University™. All students' podcasts were archived at Prof. Riabov's website (Riabov, 2014).



The students downloaded these podcasts to learn to self-assess their speaking skills by listening and comparing their speaking with their native speaking partners. This process of self-assessment turned into a powerful tool to help the students improve their speaking and listening skills (Cory-Wright, 2013).

In order to expand this opportunity, Riabov's students worked with the podcasts of news programs in Voice of America™ (VOA). They searched for the topics they were interested in, listened to the podcasts in special English, then read the scripts of these podcasts, and prepared an outline for the selected story. At home they practiced presenting this story, and in class they recorded it as they spoke in front of their classmates. These podcasts were available to students through Blackboard™. At home students self-assessed their speaking using a check list based on the Rubric for Podcast recording and script for international students (see Appendix A).

In the next class all their classmates listened to these podcasts and discussed the progress the students achieved in improving their speaking skill. By discussing the recorded podcast story students also improved their pronunciation and listening skills.

All the recorded podcasts were collected in the Digital Journal folder in Blackboard™ and students downloaded the podcasts for their extended use in the post course time. The method of digital voice journals for self-assessment is described by Davis and Delis (2008).

Now students can hear their own voices and compare them to those of the native speakers. They also learned to self-assess their own weaknesses and strengths. That led to the culture of independent active learning, developing confidence and awareness of possible improvements. The students became more and more comfortable using English in communication with the native speakers in and out of the classroom.

Here are examples of what international students posted in the Blackboard™ Discussion Forum about the development of their speaking skills:

*My [American] partners taught me how to use the Google Drive to share the text. They encouraged me to speak when I did not know how to say something in English. All of that gave me confidence. —A student from China*

*Have you ever listened to your voice while you are speaking another language? Some students thought that they were very good speakers and the others thought they were very bad, but you couldn't know that till you do a recording and listen to yourself... When I recorded for the first time I listened to my recording and it helped me to know what I should focus on. I think it helped me to know my weaknesses in pronunciation and speaking, and it helped me to speak more fluently with better vocabulary and grammar. That is why I am interested in continuing to record podcasts of my stories. —A student from Kurdistan*

*I have improved my English speaking skill by recording my podcasts. I have been learning English for many years, but I have never heard myself speak English. First time when our professor told us we would have many recordings during this term I was nervous. Now I am really proud of my progress, and I cannot believe it has just taken one and half month. Recording is a good way to improve my English. Working with all my podcasts, I could fix my accent, grammar and also can increase my vocabulary. In the future, I think I will keep recording myself because I think it is really important to know where I have been, before I go to where I want. —A student from Taiwan*

## Truly Authentic Assessment

The combined classes' experience included a wide variety of assessment strategies for both the education and ILE students. The assessments correlated to essential goals in each of their courses. For the *Learning with Technology* students, these goals centered on their technology skills, as well as their development of cultural understanding and knowledge. The outcomes aligned with published state and national standards for educators. Through a transparent and educative process, the myriad assessment strategies of the combined classes experience provided a concrete model for pre-service candidates on ways to gain accurate measurement of outcomes and gather multiple data points to inform instruction. For ILE students, Riabov's innovative use of podcasting and digital journals provided powerful assessment results that impacted student language development. There was widespread consensus among domestic and international students of the value of the experience beyond course goals and meeting standards. Perhaps the best assessment of the combined classes experience in the past year may be in the increased number of domestic and international "friends" on Facebook™ or in the increased number of home visits that have occurred unprompted or measured by the professors.

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**Appendix A: Podcast Rubrics**

**Rubric for Podcast recording and script: For education students**

<b>Criterion</b>	<b>Not Evident 0</b>	<b>Limited/ Baseline 1</b>	<b>Developing 2</b>	<b>Competent 3</b>	<b>Accomplished 4</b>
<b>Enunciation/ articulation</b>	Effort at expression and being clearly heard is not evident	Most words are not audible or clearly expressed	Some words are not audible or clearly expressed	Most words are clearly expressed and audible	Words are clearly expressed and audible
<b>Enthusiasm</b>	Enthusiasm as demonstrated by voice/tone and language is not evident	Is mostly flat (monotone) with little to no conversational voice and language	Is mostly flat (monotone) with some conversational voice and language	Mostly uses conversational voice and language, but is somewhat flat	Captures the spirit of “podcasting” as a anywhere, anytime radio show by using proper voice and language in a conversational tone
<b>Organization of ideas/topic</b>	Effort at organization topic is not evident	Topic is missing key organization pieces such as clear introduction, ending or logical presentation of ideas	Topic is missing a clear introduction and/or ending and/or ideas are not presented in a clear order	Topic is mostly clearly presented but beginning or end may be not clear or middle not as substantive	Topic is presented in a logical manner that includes a clear introduction and ending with substantive conversation
<b>Collaborative effort (approx. 50-50 speaking)</b>	Effort at collaboration was not evident.	Partners have noticeable unequal representation (time speaking) in script and podcast	Partners have some imbalance in terms of representation (time speaking) in script and podcast	Partners have mostly equal representation (time speaking) in script and podcast	Partners have equal representation (time speaking) in script and podcast
<b>Script Content</b>	No script was produced	Typed script reflects no connections made between the partners	Typed script reflects mostly superficial connections made between the partners	Typed script reflects mostly surface with some deeper connections made between the partners	Typed script reflects both surface and substantive connections made between the partners



## Appendix A: Podcast Rubrics (Continued)

## Rubric for Podcast recording and script: For international students

Criterion	Not Evident 0	Limited/ Baseline 1	Developing 2	Competent 3	Accomplished 4
<b>Pronunciation/ articulation</b>	Effort at pronunciation and being clearly heard is not evident	Most words are not correctly pronounced or clearly expressed	Some words are not correctly pronounced or clearly expressed	Most words are correctly pronounced, clearly expressed, and audible	Words are correctly pronounced, clearly expressed, and audible
<b>Enthusiasm</b>	Enthusiasm as demonstrated by voice/tone and language is not evident	Is mostly flat (monotone) with little to no conversational voice and language	Is mostly flat (monotone) with some conversational voice and language	Mostly uses conversational voice and language, but is somewhat flat	Captures the spirit of “podcasting” as a anywhere, anytime radio show by using proper voice and language in a conversational tone
<b>Voice Projection, Fluency, &amp; Pauses</b>	Student searched for the words and pauses were too long.	Student's speech did not show appropriate voice projection, fluency, and pauses.	Student's speech showed appropriate voice projection, fluency, and pauses only some of the time.	Student's speech showed appropriate voice projection, fluency, and pauses most of the time	Student projected his/her voice well and spoke naturally and fluently, with appropriate pauses.
<b>Organization of ideas/topic</b>	Effort at organization topic is not evident	Topic is missing key organization pieces such as clear introduction, ending or logical presentation of ideas	Topic is missing a clear introduction and/or ending and/or ideas are not presented in a clear order	Topic is mostly clearly presented but beginning or end may be not clear or middle not as substantive	Topic is presented in a logical manner that includes a clear introduction and ending with substantive conversation
<b>Collaborative effort (approx. 50-50 speaking)</b>	Effort at collaboration was not evident.	Partners have noticeable unequal representation (time speaking) in script and podcast	Partners have some imbalance in terms of representation (time speaking) in script and podcast	Partners have mostly equal representation (time speaking) in script and podcast	Partners have equal representation (time speaking) in script and podcast
<b>Grammar</b>	So many grammatical errors evident in podcast recording that meaning is unclear or confusing	5 or more grammatical errors evident in podcast recording	3-4 grammatical errors evident in podcast recording	1-2 grammatical errors evident in podcast recording	No grammatical errors in podcast recording

**Appendix B: Pre Survey for Teacher Candidates**

<b>Pre Cultural Collaboration Survey</b>				
<b>Strongly Disagree (1)</b>	<b>Disagree (2)</b>	<b>Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)</b>	<b>Agree (4)</b>	<b>Strongly Agree (5)</b>
1. I think the best way to learn someone's culture is in the face-to-face environment.				
2. I feel that experiencing a cultural collaboration is important in the preparation of someone going in to the field of education.				
3. I believe technology can help facilitate the connection to students who are racially, religiously or ethnically diverse from me.				
4. I have experienced cultural exchanges or collaborations in my other SNHU classes.				
5. I have a lot of knowledge about countries around the globe.				
6. I would like the opportunity to meet and collaborate with an international student from SNHU.				
7. I believe International students are a good resource for learning about other cultures.				
8. I have met and talked with International students through a class here at SNHU.				
9. I am open to interacting with an international student on campus.				
10. I am considering a study abroad program.				
11. I am planning to travel to another country.				
12. Many of my SNHU classes teach the importance of culture and diversity.				
13. I would like opportunities to practice using digital tools with other students (college or K-12).				
14. I am looking forward to our cultural exchange in this class.				
15. I believe all SNHU students should experience a cultural exchange with the International students.				
16. I am from a very diverse (racially, ethnically etc.) hometown and high school.				
17. I understand the cultural competencies needed for classroom teaching.				
18. I have a lot of knowledge of other countries' cultural traditions.				
19. I believe that sharing cultural traditions and beliefs can lead to understanding and friendships.				
20. I believe that sharing cultural traditions and beliefs can help me gain a better understanding of my own cultural identity.				

Appendix C: Post Survey for Teacher Candidates

<b>Post Cultural Collaboration Survey</b>				
<b>Strongly Disagree (1)</b>	<b>Disagree (2)</b>	<b>Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)</b>	<b>Agree (4)</b>	<b>Strongly Agree (5)</b>
1. I think the best way to learn someone's culture is in the face-to-face environment.				
2. I feel that experiencing a cultural collaboration is important in the preparation of someone going in to the field of education.				
3. Technology (e.g., Google Earth™, podcasting) was a helpful tool in facilitating my connection to my international partner.				
4. I have experienced cultural exchanges or collaborations in my other SNHU classes.				
5. I have a lot of knowledge about countries around the globe.				
6. I learned new things about International students that I did not know before.				
7. I believe International students are a good resource for learning about other cultures.				
8. Our class time would have been better spent on other content.				
9. I am more likely now to interact with an international student on campus.				
10. I am considering a study abroad program.				
11. I am planning to travel to another country.				
12. All SNHU students should experience a cultural exchange with the International students.				
13. I would like opportunities to practice using digital tools with other students (college or K-12).				
14. I feel I have made a new friend on campus because of this experience.				
15. I feel more confident to use some technology in the classroom after this experience.				
16. I would have preferred to learn about culture/cultural competency another way.				
17. I understand the cultural competencies needed for classroom teaching.				
18. I have a lot of knowledge of other countries' cultural traditions.				
19. I believe that sharing cultural traditions and beliefs can lead to understanding and friendships.				
20. I believe that sharing cultural traditions and beliefs can help me gain a better understanding of my own cultural identity.				

**Appendix D: Pre Survey for ESL Students**

**Respond to these statements by checking a corresponding box**

##	Questions	Agree	Strongly Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	Communicating with American students helps to learn American culture				
2	I have a good opportunity to meet with American students on campus				
3	It is easy to meet and make friends with American students on campus				
4	Communicating with American students can help me to improve my English				
5	American students are good resource to learn about American Culture				
6	I would like to have an experience attending a class with American students				
7	Having a combined class will help me to develop confidence for my future studies in college				
8	I would like to interview American students				
9	I would like to tell American students about my country and culture				
10	I believe that exchanging ideas about culture and values of our countries can help develop mutual understanding and friendship				

## Appendix E: Post Survey for ESL Students

Respond to these statements by checking a corresponding box

##	Questions	Agree	Strongly Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	I had a good experience to practice speaking with domestic students				
2	This experience helps me to develop confidence for my future classes in college?				
3	I have learned about American students life by interviewing them				
4	I plan to continue communication with these students beyond the class time				
5	The topics we discussed were useful for me				
6	I can improve my English studying in combined classes				
7	I would like to have more of such classes				
8	American students are a very good resource for learning about American culture				
9	I have learned that we are different but at the same time similar				
10	American students appreciated the information about my country				

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